MUCKROCK BACKGROUND

Since its founding in 2010, MuckRock has helped dozens of newsrooms, hundreds of journalists, and thousands of ordinary citizens file, track, and share over 20,000 public records requests, resulting in the release of over 800,000 pages of previously secret government documents, as well as numerous databases, Powerpoint presentations, hours of video, and even source code.

With its staff of four, it has become the globally-recognized resource for information on public records and the Freedom of Information Act in the United States, directly leading to articles in publications including the Washington Post and Wall Street Journal, programs like the Daily Show, and hundreds of other outlets of all sizes around the globe.

The site's own original reporting, published daily, has led to the cancellation of wasteful government programs, Congressional questioning of top U.S. officials, and the end of local domestic surveillance programs. But the true power of the site has been with its platform, which allows anyone to easily sign up and get answers to their questions, It's a unique mix of software and a community of public records experts, lawyers, journalists, and activists.

Some projects include:

- An investigation into use of biometric tracking by local police by the Electronic Frontier Foundation.
- A national survey of how municipalities use fines and fees as a backdoor tax on the poorest by the Sunlight Foundation.
- A national compilation of police use of force policies by Campaign Zero.

Users can also take advantage of the work done by others, thanks to tens of thousands of public records requests documented on the site.

By ultimately making the entire request process public (journalists can embargo their requests temporarily), millions have been able to learn more about our country's vital transparency laws even as they read about what their government is doing in their name.

MuckRock's mission is to empower citizens to understand and improve their democracy. Our Freedom of Information Act and public records filing tool has done just that, making the process inviting for beginners while helping experienced requesters scale their work to a scope that, without MuckRock, is simply not possible.

TEAM BIOGRAPHIES

Michael Morisy *Co-founder*

Michael Morisy co-founded MuckRock in 2010 and manages the site's operations and oversees editorial strategy. In 2014–2015, he was named a John S. Knight Journalism Fellow at Stanford University, where he researched crowdsourcing, machine learning, and the future of distributed reporting.

He was previously an editor at the Boston Globe, where he launched the paper's technology vertical BetaBoston. In 2006, he contributed to the New York Daily News' Pulitzer Prize-winning editorial series on the deadly, often-ignored health conditions of Ground Zero workers.

His reporting has covered technology and startups as well as issues of public interest such as government surveillance and waste, pollution, and policing.

He graduated in 2007 from Cornell University with a degree in English.

Mitchell Kotler *Co-founder*

The technical co-founder of MuckRock, Mitchell Kotler is the site's lead developer and site architect.

He is a veteran of multiple technology companies and startups, including AMD, Achronix, and eProvenance. He graduated magna cum laude with a bachelor's degree in Electrical and Computer Engineering from Cornell University in 2007, and earned a master's degree from Cornell in 2008.

He was in the Eta Kappa Nu (HKN) Electrical and Computer Engineering Honor Society.

J. Patrick Brown *Executive editor*

J. Patrick Brown joined MuckRock in 2014 as the site's Editor, overseeing all editorial operations. He is the former Editor-in-Chief of the alternative weekly newspaper DigBoston and Web Editor of Scout Magazine.

He has been published in the Boston Herald, and his public records reporting has been covered by Newsweek, the New York Times, the Daily Show and other publications.

He graduated from Bowdoin College in 2008 with a degree in English Literature and Comparative Religion.

Beryl C.D. Lipton *Senior reporter*

Beryl C.D. Lipton joined MuckRock in 2014 and is the site's reporter, primarily covering incarceration and criminal justice. She also manages educational outreach, managing partnerships with MuckRock and school groups to train the next generation in civic engagement and transparency. She graduated from Harvard University in 2011 with a degree in History and Literature of America. She previously was a researcher with Texans for Public Justice.

Caitlin Russell *Administrative Assistant*

Caitlin Russell as worked as a reporter for a number of news outlets in eastern Massachusetts since graduating from Suffolk University in 2011. Her time as a local reporter taught her that there are nearly as many interpretations

of the word "public" as there are records clerks. She handles a number of administrative office functions as well as reports on local records access and accountability issues in Massachusetts.

TECHNOLOGY

Over the past six years, MuckRock has built the world's most advanced public records filing and tracking tool, with a heavy focus on accessibility and ease of use. It offers an extensive API, analytics on response times and rates of thousands of agencies and jurisdictions, and advanced filtering and searching.

It interoperates seamlessly with thousands of agencies in every city and state in the country, as well as at the federal level, making the public records process as easy for our users as defining what they're interested in and clicking submit — hiding a complex back end that mixes postal mail, fax services, and a system of automatic request generation and follow up.

As we've scaled up from hundreds of requests to tens of thousands, we've also built key technologies that allow a small staff to efficiently handle the work:

- A task management system that takes every aspect of the request flow that can't be fully automated and turns it into simple, small tasks that can be done without training right on site, allowing us to scalably, efficiently crowdsource complex processes with volunteers while maintaining almost perfect accuracy.
- A machine learning system that, having been trained on hundreds of thousands of properly classified request communications, can automatically classify 75% of public records responses without any human intervention.
- A crowdfunding platform that helps our users raise money for both request fees as well as larger transparency projects, and helps manage notifications to supporters of the project on its progress.

The site also integrates OCR, which automatically makes previously unsearchable PDFs more easy to analyze, as well as the ability to, with just a few clicks, file a request with dozens or even hundreds of agencies.

FINANCIALS

MuckRock's ongoing operations are funded entirely by its user base, which pays small fees — between $20 and $40 —to use the site to file, track, and share public records requests. We also offer organizational accounts as well as an on-site crowdfunding platform which helps fund both our ongoing operations as well as original journalism from ourselves and others. We offer free accounts to financially-constrained reporters doing work in the public interest.

Independence and sustainability are core to our mission, and we believe having a broad user base that directly supports the work we do is key to continued impact.

Since our founding in 2010, we have been grateful for the generosity of many groups that have helped us reach our goals.

Previous grants include the following:

Organization	Year Awarded	Amount
Sunlight Foundation	2010	$ 5,000
Freedom of the Press Foundation	2013	$ 16,000
Tow-Knight Center	2013	$ 25,000
Fund for Investigative Journalism	2013	$ 5,000
Knight Foundation	2014	$ 35,000
Arnold Foundation	2016-2017	$ 140,000
Total		**$ 226,000**

PARTNERS AND USERS

MuckRock has directly helped thousands file and track public records requests, and millions more have taken advantage of MuckRock's free and public repository of government documents and request ideas. Our work with the Marshall Project on military gear flowing to local police departments sparked widespread attention and major reforms, while a partnership with the Electronic Frontier Foundation focused on domestic use of drones lead to the cancellation of unauthorized several programs. Below are some of our users and national partners.

GROWTH

No single metric fully captures MuckRock's impact, but the two below — the total number of requests filed through the site and total pages released — gives a sense for not just growth but the increased pace of growth over the past few years.